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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the Pathfinders program in New York (New York), which works to facilitate the full integration of adults with developmental disabilities into workplaces and neighborhoods. The paper is organized around the question of whether students graduating from special education can find paid and volunteer work in community settings, become involved in social and recreational activities in their neighborhoods, and develop new friendships and associations in these settings. Discussion focuses on the concept of "capacity thinking," which stresses five ideas: (1) building a capacity view of the individual; (2) challenging deficiency thinking; (3) discovering opportunities; (4) increasing expectations; and (5) advocating for necessary resources and services. Other principles include person-centered work and development projects, making space to work outside the current system of special education and adult services, investing in renewal, forum creation, and person-centered planning. Excerpts from participants' comments on their experiences illustrate the paper's ideas. (Contains 14 references.) (DB)

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Pathfinders: Making a Way From Segregation to Community Life

by
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John O'Brien, and Fredda Rosen

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Pathfinders

Making A Way From Segregation To Community Life

Connie Lyle O'Brien, Beth Mount, John O'Brien and Fredda Rosen

Pathfinders's Focus Question

Could students graduating from special education whose current best option is placement in a segregated adult facility find paid and volunteer work in community settings, become involved in social and recreational activities in their neighborhoods, and develop new friendships and associations in their workplaces and neighborhoods?

We are grateful to the students and family members who have inspired us with their vision, courage, and determination. Special thanks to Vaulda Kendall-Browne, Ramon Rodriguez, Josh, Michael, and Roberta Wolf, and Phyllis Jeffrey for sharing their stories in writing. Thanks to Pathfinders staff, Carolann Granata and Debbie Lamothe for the example of their work and for their help in writing this paper. Thanks also to Kathy Broderick, New York State Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities for her support of the Pathfinders Project.

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Making A Way From Segregation To Community Life

> *Pathfinders has made a world of difference for my grand-daughter, Shunelle, and for me, too. After the meetings, I feel so much more informed and enlightened in terms of understanding that possibilities exist in our communities for people with disabilities.*
>
> *I never thought that Shunelle would be able to do the things she's doing right now. I didn't know that I could trust myself to allow her to negotiate the world on her own. But in the last few months, Shunelle has begun traveling to work, to therapy, the beauty salon, a favorite Chinese restaurant and my office on her own. She seems happy about her accomplishments and newfound independence. (Jeffery, 1999)*

> *Pathfinders helped us put the emphasis on who Josh is, what he can do, not what he can't do, and his own particular loves, interests, values, and strengths. We began seeing him differently and thus with more hope and less despair over what he can't do... Person-centered planning helped us to focus on creating a community for Josh. I can't emphasize that enough. As we think about Josh's future, there's nothing more important that we can do for him than to help build a community around him because one of our concerns and fears has been his isolation and lack of friends. (Wolf, 2000/2001)*

Shunelle and Josh have been among a small group of young New Yorkers finding their own paths into community life from segregated school experiences. Instead of spending their final two years of eligibility for special education looking forward to catching special busses to day activity centers or sheltered workshops, this group of Pathfinders have rolled and walked from their homes to experience new connections and opportunities in their own neighborhoods and in the vibrant cultural and economic life that is a bus or subway ride away. They have been accompanied on their way by small teams made up of family members and allies from their schools and adult services. The work of their teams has been supported by Pathfinders, a project initiated and implemented by Job Path, an adult service provider committed to innovation in

services to people with developmental disabilities, with co-sponsorship from New York State's Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD), New York State's Developmental Disabilities Council, and New York City's special education program.

It is reasonable to ask what Shunelle and Josh and their fellow Pathfinders have to say about inclusion in community life. New York City's public schools enroll about 1,100,000 students; about 85,000 of these students receive special education services, and 20,000 of these students are served by District 75, a separate administrative unit, that among other programs operates 60 special education schools at more than 300 program sites. Some sites and schools are co-located with another of the city's more than 1,000 regular schools, but most high school students spend most of their time in a combination of self-contained class work and community based instruction near their school. Because schools specialize in particular disabilities or program purposes (transition, for example), most students are transported out of their local areas. (NYC Board of Education, 2001). The IEP's for all 96 Pathfinders participants identify a District 75 school as the least restrictive environment for them.

Like most systems, New York City's special education and adult services aspire to seamless transitions for special education graduates. However, the design of the city's adult service system for people with developmental disabilities makes continuing segregation the most likely outcome for District 75 graduates. Very large agencies operate a range of large Medicaid funded day programs backed up by clinics and specialized transport arrangements. Those family members who had considered the future after special education came to Pathfinders with the unquestioned assumption that a slot in an existing program represented the best possible alternative. Their questions were about how to marshal the necessary resources to avoid long waits for adult services and how to select a suitable day program from those on offer.

Pathfinders witness the deep wells of capacity that can be tapped even in an enormous system bound to large scale, life-long segregation.

So Pathfinders's participants cannot testify to the benefits of inclusive schooling or the good effects of major system's change efforts. But we think that Pathfinders's students and their families witness

the deep wells of capacity that can be tapped even in an enormous system bound to large scale, life-long segregation; even in a city that prides itself on being the nation's biggest, densest, fastest paced, most competitive, and most aggressive; even among families who struggle with poverty, language and cultural barriers, and a history of poor relationships with schools and professionals; even with students who most people have defined as too disabled to face the demands and experience the rewards of ordinary life. Almost every Pathfinders's participant has gained at least five things: some new neighborhood connections; a clear vision of their interests and gifts shared with family members and some of the staff that assist them; a plan for developing opportunities; membership in a supportive network of other people with disabilities and family members; and better informed expectations that the adult service system should provide them with individualized support to work and participate in community life.

Pathfinders's participants also witness the stickiness of segregated services. Despite good person centered plans and an adult service system publicly committed to fund and deliver individualized supports for inclusive lives, almost half of Pathfinders's participants are hostages to segregated adult services or remain at home without day services because more individualized supports have proven too hard for adult service providers to arrange or sustain. Many who attend segregated adult programs do maintain the local connections initiated during Pathfinders, but it is their own energy and the support of families and community members that makes this happen.

Change has happened because a small group decided to work together.

Change has not happened here because billion dollar systems have thrown their full weight into new paradigms of special education and individualized supports. Change has happened because a small group of teachers, school administrators, and adult services managers decided to work together, with leadership from the City's smallest adult service provider, to see what might be possible for a few students with disabilities and families who have been willing to explore new paths. Some of the people who have invested in and learned from Pathfinders hold key positions in their organizations as managers, administrators, and transition coordinators, and so its effects slowly multiply as these people

work to re-align the systems in which they work. But this painstaking work is slow to shift an enormous system's inertia, and so we can only report on the way to small, fragile and significant changes in a very big and complex place.

The Challenge of Capacity Thinking in New York City

Capacity thinking is the art of discovering the qualities that a person with a developmental disability can contribute to community life and then discovering people and places that value that contribution.

***Capacity thinking*: the art of discovering the qualities a person can contribute to community life and then discovering people and places that value that contribution.**

The city's scale and variety challenges the imagination and organizing skills of any reformer. There is the challenge of demographics. If its 309 square miles were a state, its more than 8 million inhabitants would make it the nation's 12th largest. Almost a million immigrants established themselves in the city in the past ten years, adding to a mix of racial and ethnic identities that counts 35% of the population as white, 27% as Hispanic, 25% as African-American, and 10% as Asian. (Census 2000). In 1990, Manhattan had the highest level of income inequality of any county in the US: the top income quintile made 33 times more than the bottom quintile. Average 1990 family income in a census tract between 85th and 91st streets was $301,000; average family income in a census tract between 145th and 150th street was $6,000 (Beverage, 1996).

Students in the city's public school system speak 140 languages at home. Sixteen per-cent of public school students identify themselves as white. More than half are eligible for free lunches (NYC Board of Education, 2001)and 62% of students have addresses in areas of concentrated poverty. (Campaign for Fiscal Equity, 2001).

There is the challenge of political and administrative complexity. Since the city's consolidation in 1898, borough governments have been in chronic conflict with mayors. And for 200 years the city has been in contention with the New York State legislature. Most adult services to people with developmental disabilities are administered by New York State's Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities. Education is the City's affair, managed by a complexly decentralized bureaucracy that continues to struggle to provide adequate buildings and a sufficient number of trained

teachers to meet the demand for high quality schooling. The administrators negotiating agreements around transition count their budgets in the tens and hundreds of millions and function as part of multibillion dollar systems responsible to different levels of government whose political leaders have conflicting agendas which may or may not coincide with the agendas of the people who administer public systems. Everything around Pathfinders has a highly charged political dimension.

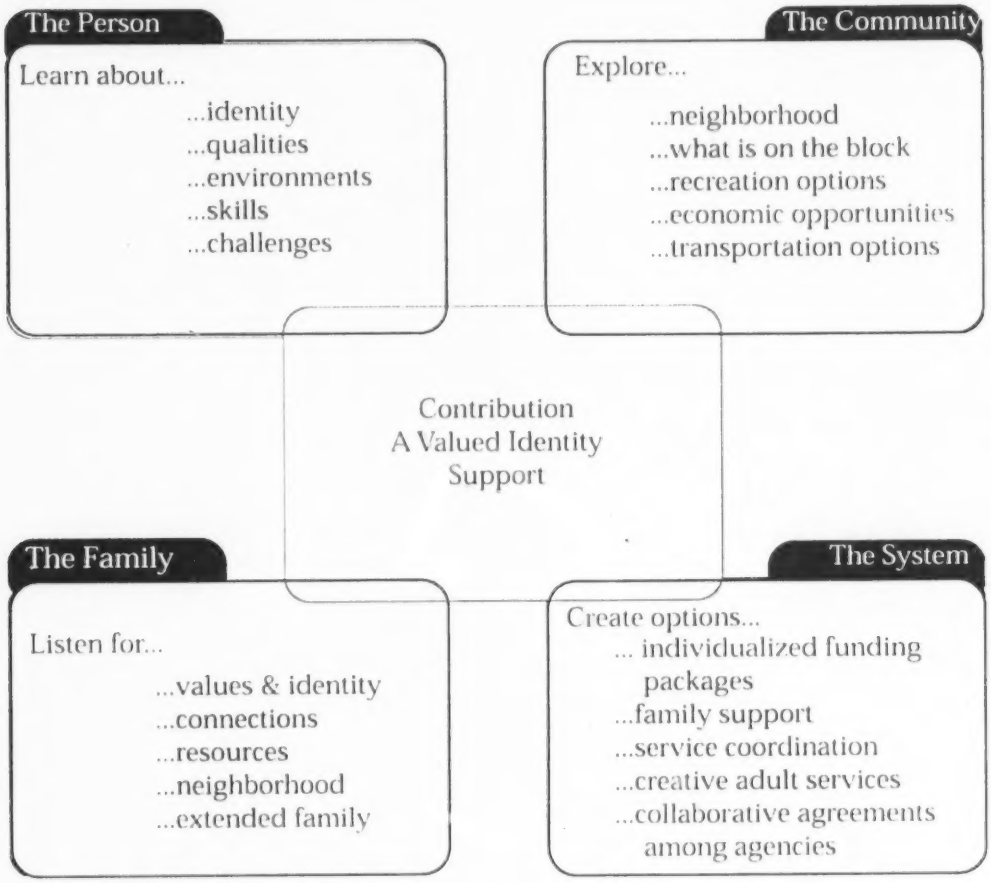
There is the challenge of overwhelming variety. Yale University publishes a 2.5 inch thick *Encyclopedia of New York City*; Oxford University publishes a series entitled *The History of New York City*; Princeton University publishes a history of the city's water supply that documents a two hundred year history of power struggles between profit and public service (Koeppel, 2000). *The New York Times*, in addition to its stable of culture, entertainment, and food critics, employs six columnists to chronicle city life, including Randy Kennedy, whose *Tunnel Vision* column covers life in, on and around the city's subways.

Huge scale, diversity, variety, complexity and the special education and human service system's attempts to respond to them all challenge capacity thinking. Many District 75 students travel long distances from their own neighborhoods to work with teachers who may also commute a long distance to pursue community based instruction in a neighborhood in which neither teacher nor student lives. This matters because neighborhood matters to most New Yorkers. Neighborhood resources and relationships contribute significantly to many people's sense of identity and security.

Practicing capacity thinking calls on the gift of seeing past obvious poverty and apparent difference and danger spots to find the local associations and places where a good life goes on.

Practicing capacity thinking in New York requires looking closely at the blocks around where a person lives and being able to spot places and people that might welcome that person's contribution. Sometimes this calls for people with the gift of seeing past obvious poverty and apparent difference and even danger spots to find the local associations and places where a good life goes on. Cultivating the art of finding the niches that escape the system's notice and assisting people with developmental disabilities to inhabit them along with their neighbors takes a systematic approach to person-

centered development. The figure below describes the Pathfinders' framework for discovering capacity in the social spaces too small for the big systems to notice.

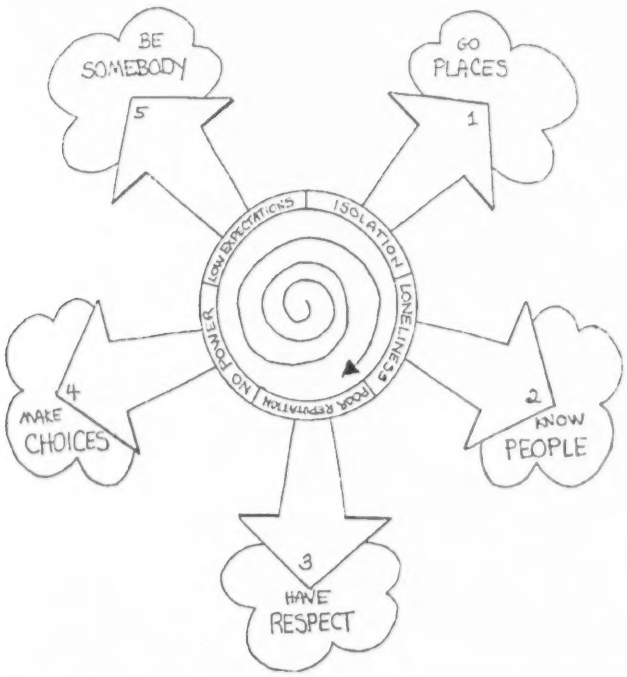


A Person-centered Development Project

A relentless search to discover and mobilize hidden capacity threads through the whole fabric of Pathfinders. In relationship to the city's special education and adult service systems, Pathfinders as a whole is designed as a person-centered development project (Mount, 1994). In relationship to each student and team, Pathfinders focuses on generating actions that challenge a deficiency view of person, family, neighborhood, and city (Mount, 2000a and Mount 2000b).

Person-centered work holds the worth of clear values and the reality of uncertainty.

Person-centered work holds both the worth of clear values and the reality of uncertainty. The worth of specialized supports is measured by their contribution to people's experience of five valued experiences: the respect that comes from playing a valued social role, sharing ordinary places and activities, participating in relationships and associations, making choices, and contributing to community life (O'Brien and Lyle O'Brien, 1987). The valued experiences summarized in the image below indicate an overall direction for each individual's unique search for a good life.



Uncertainty derives from two sources. First, people differ gloriously in their heritage and in their gifts and in their actual and potential relationships. Second, opportunities are unpredictable. Many people find their way to interesting and satisfying lives when preparation makes an unexpected connection.

Person-centered work does not offer a programmatic answer. It defines a process that supports people to explore their interests and gifts and to search for opportunities to develop them. Understanding of each person's identity and gifts grows and changes as they design, try, and revise personally meaningful next in their particular circumstances. System managers can't mandate big quick-fixes full blown, but they can support the transfer of lessons from person to person and from place to place.

Person-centered development projects have four aspects: a focus question, a working group that creates the space to explore new ways to act on that question, ways to learn and renew, and forums that engage people with authority over important resources in the learning generated by the working groups. These projects develop recursively, like ripples in a pond. The energy and learning from an initial pattern of person-centered change generates interest and informs action among a wider circle of people. This wider circle revises and repeats the pattern in ways that energize and inform a still wider circle.

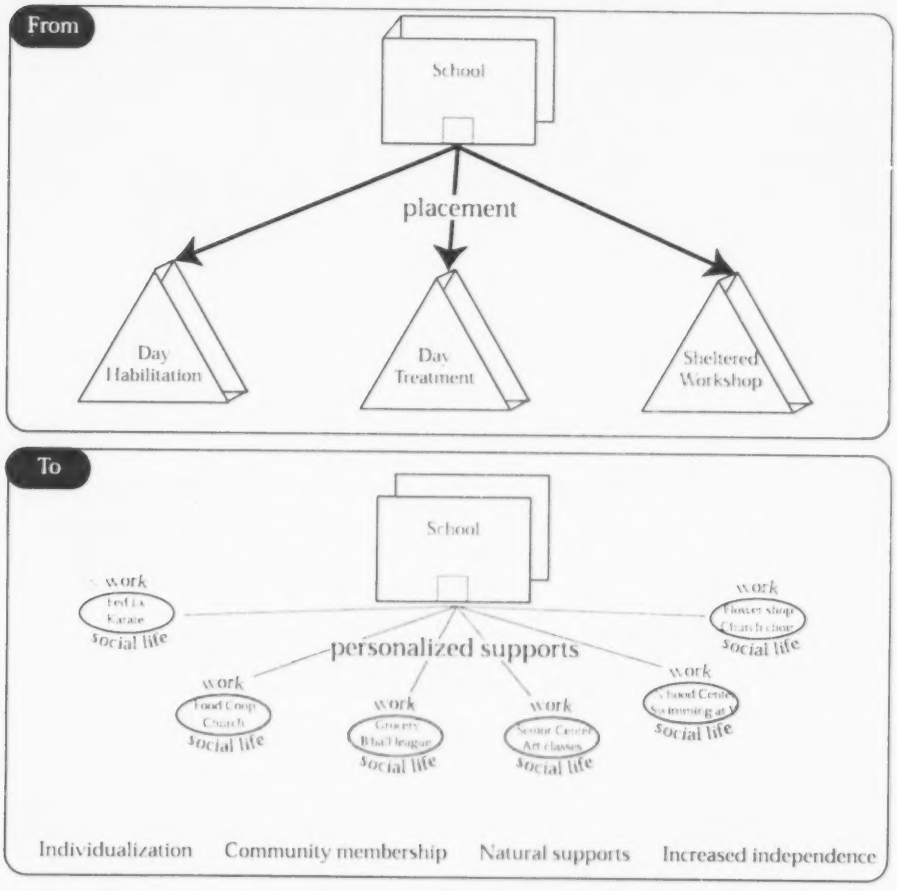
Aspects of person-centered development:
A focus question
A working group
Ways to learn & renew
Forums to engage decison-makers

Framing a Focus Question

Person-centered development projects turn on a focus question that motivates a working group to learn together by changing the opportunities available to a growing number of people. For Pathfinders, the focus question is, **Could students whose current best option is placement in a segregated adult facility find paid and volunteer work in community settings, become involved in social and recreational activities in their neighborhoods, and develop new friendships and associations in their workplaces and neighborhoods?**

Notice that this question invites broad participation because it can be grasped from at least two starting points. Some people, including the originators of the project, see this as a question about the

education system's and adult service system's capacity to provide effective assistance. For them, the ability of people with developmental disabilities and their families and their neighborhoods is not in question. Other people, including many of the people with developmental disabilities and families and school staff who have been active and successful in Pathfinders, take this as a question about what is possible for people with developmental disabilities who live in New York City. Either way of taking the focus question seriously will get people on the path with an attitude of experimentation. It is not necessary to convert to a belief in people's capacity before joining the work. It is only necessary to join with a genuine interest in discovering where the limits lie and a genuine interest in discovering creative ways to push those limits back.



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Making Space to Work

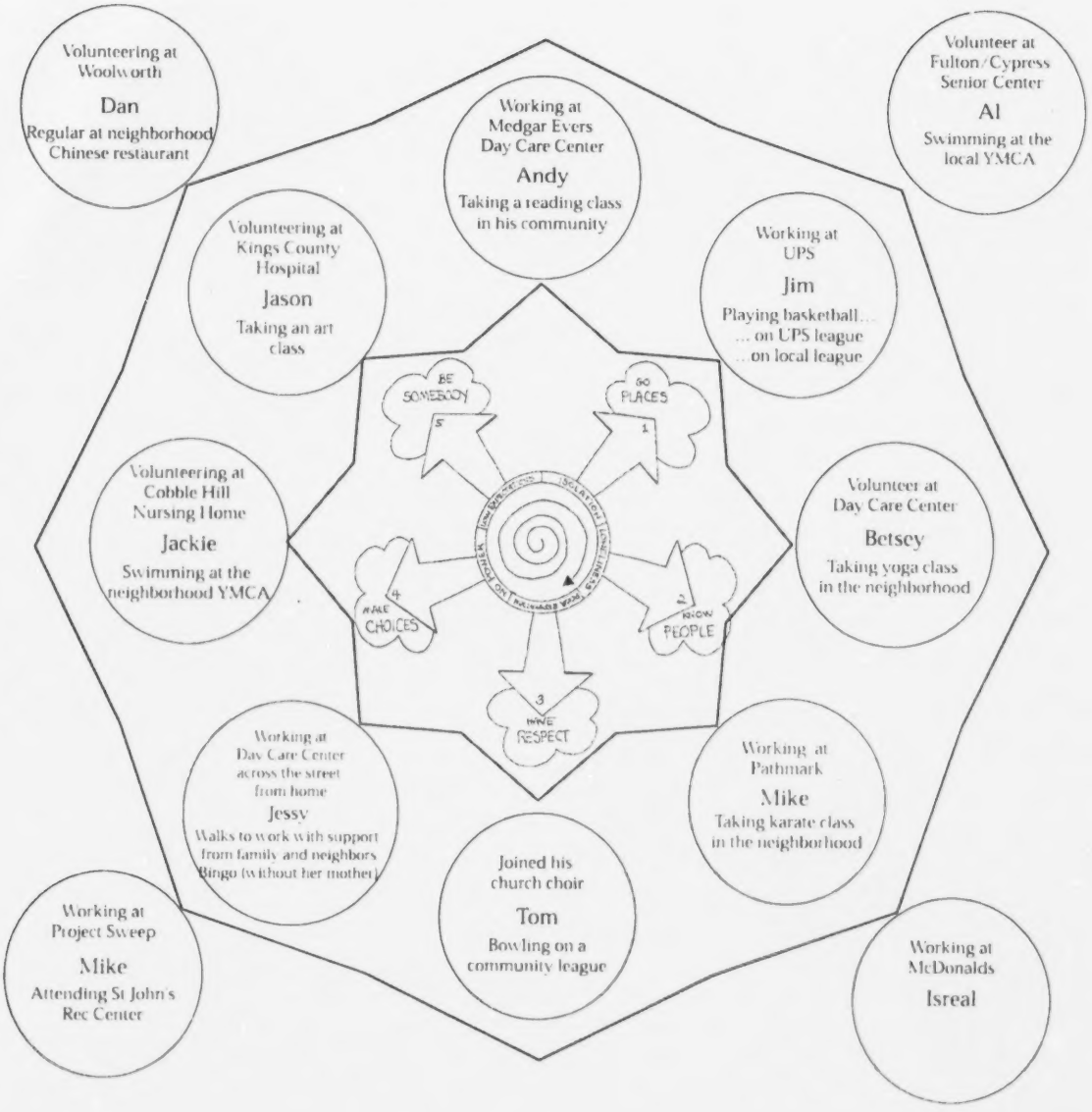
Create a space to work outside the current system's habits, roles, and demands

Because continuing segregation is the typical result of the current system of special education and adult services, people who take the focus question seriously have to create a space to work outside the current system's habits and demands. The seed of Pathfinders was formed in 1993 when teachers and administrators from nine District 75 schools joined District 75 Transition Coordinators to learn person-centered planning by joining teams with 12 students and family members from their schools. Initially, a training course provided the necessary shelter from routine to allow new possibilities to emerge. School people and family members were able to give themselves sufficient time and space outside ordinary requirements to produce exciting results and important learning. The energy from this initial effort stimulated the development of a project to carry the work forward.

The diagram on the next page summarizes some of the new roles and connections some students have developed in their own neighborhoods through their participation in Pathfinders. The logo in the center of the figure expresses the project's values.

One parent vividly expresses the way this process developed in her son's life. Her account captures an important quality of the space necessary for Pathfinders to work. In this space, people collaborate outside their usual roles and boundaries. This involves school staff in moving from familiar territory to explore the opportunities available in Spencer's physical world. It involves Spencer and his family calling on their personal networks in new ways. It means suspending certainty that anyone, professional or parent, fully understands Spencer in favor of looking for new ways to decode his responses to changes in his expanding world. Notice that participation in the project accelerated a change that had already begun in Spencer's school.

> *Spencer and I were very fortunate to be in 373K (a District 75 school) with a Principal and Assistant Principal who were willing to listen to us and think differently. As the result of many failures to get Spencer to "adjust" to the inside of the school, we began to brainstorm together how to support him to be out in the community with good support. We finally*



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found the right match between Spencer and a paraprofessional who respected Spencer and understood instead of just trying to control him.

As we were involved in this brainstorming, we attended a person-centered planning workshop sponsored by District 75. Wow! This was it! We discovered that other people were thinking positively about the lives of people with disabilities, and we developed even better ideas for jobs and other community activities that Spencer might enjoy. Spencer's behavior did not just change over night just because we were thinking about creative options. However, we did find that we were more able to listen to and interpret his behavior and make better choices on his behalf.

Spencer got a job at the Barnes and Noble bookstore on the Pratt Institute campus. This was a good fit because we had connections there, Spencer loved the work, and he was able to dress beautifully which is part of his claim to fame. He worked alongside college students stocking the bookshelves. He loved it, and the students were very supportive of him.

We have learned that things do not just get better and stay better. Spencer's advocate, the store manager, left and was replaced by another manager who was not supportive of Spencer. Spencer picked up on the manager's negative attitude and engaged old tactics of acting out; so we began to look for another job. Spencer was still having outbursts, but they were far less frequent as he began to be more independent and form his own life.

We have learned that things do not just get better and stay better.

When things fell apart at the bookstore, Spencer had already graduated from high school and we were already involved with an adult service agency that provides individualized support for community experience.

Spencer now works as a store associate in the shoe department at a K-Mart in Brooklyn where he has been employed for three years. (Kendall-Browne, 2000)

Investing in renewal

Person-centered development is a learning process for everyone involved. It is a matter of discovering and sharing new ways, not of transmitting pre-formed answers. Confusion and discouragement arise. New clarity and joyful surprises arise. And sometimes people get stuck on a plateau.

Pathfinders invests in renewal by creating habits and rituals among its participants. They share their dreams and visions. They devote regular time to celebrating good news. They routinely talk about what is working and what needs to be improved. They reflect on what they are learning from their efforts. They find occasions to tell others their stories and the lessons they have learned.

Over time, sharing dreams and good news has a powerful effect.

Over time, the ritual of sharing dreams and good news has had a powerful effect on many people with developmental disabilities. At large group workshops, a young woman who spent her first workshop in silence, head down, now demands her turn with the microphone. She says that hearing other students with disabilities speak inspired her to use her voice. A very shy young man without speech, overlooked in last year's final workshop because of his usual reluctance to share with a large group, interrupted to bring forward the poster that expresses his dream and chose a team member to interpret it for the workshop. As the annual sequence of five workshops unfolds, each with its time and rituals for renewal, voices become more clear, signs more emphatic, shoulders straighter. These changes in communication reflect changes in what people have tried and changes in the support they experience from the people who love them and the people who teach them, changes that need to be given meaning by sharing them.

Creating forums

From the point of view of the managers of the systems whose routines define the life-chances of people with developmental disabilities, person-centered development projects can play the sort of role that Lewis and Clark played for Thomas Jefferson. They bring news of how to find previously uncharted destinations, appreciation of the good things to be found there, and estimates of the costs and risks of further development. The best medium for communi-

cating a project's discovery is a forum. Forums allow face-to-face contact between those involved in a person-centered development project and those with authority over resources that matter to continuing and disseminating the project's work. Forums bring people together for creative problem solving; they are not structured as reports to decision-makers but as occasions to jointly design platforms for changes in the system's policies, practices, and programs that will multiply the benefits from the project's learning.

Forums bring people together to jointly design changes in the system.

Forums make the most of the strength of person-centered development projects, which change what the whole system does for small number of people who are actively involved in designing the change. Their efforts demonstrate new possibilities and identify the exact system rules, routines, and structures that block important next steps or make it difficult for others to follow the path. Forums set the problem of adapting the system squarely in front of its managers so that growing numbers of people will benefit from what project participants have demonstrated. Forums allow the kind of thinking that will influence decision-maker's agendas over time.

Some forums happen in large groups, but many involve a few interested people thinking together about how the Pathfinders's experience is relevant to their assigned tasks. Pathfinders forums have involved principals from District 75 schools, District 75 Transition Coordinators, regional OMRDD managers, and adult service agency managers in considering the implications of the Pathfinders's experience for their work. District 75 personnel say that their participation in Pathfinders has influenced curriculum for 14 to 18 year olds in at least one school, the ways in which several schools involve students and family members in IEP's, and some of the District's transition planning process. OMRDD and adult service managers say that participation in Pathfinders has influenced the ways they plan with people and families and strengthened their commitment to individualized supports and to "day programs without walls" (an individualized alternative to activity centers). The complexity of the systems makes Pathfinders one influence among many competing forces. The purpose of forums is to make that influence as clear and strong as possible.

The Search for Capacity

The Pathfinders's project offers students in their last two years of eligibility for special education two kinds of support: focused staff time and a person-centered planning process. When this support is successful, students have a team that includes members of their family, school staff, and adult service staff, a person-centered plan that guides their team in supporting their search for new possibilities, and the funding necessary to move smoothly to receiving individualized supports from an effective and well informed adult service provider.

The Core Process

1. **Build a capacity view**
2. **Challenge deficiency thinking**
3. **Discover opportunities**
4. **Increase expectations**
5. **Advocate**

Five themes define the core of the Pathfinders process. These themes guide the work of each student's team and structure each Pathfinder's workshop.

1. Build a capacity view of the students and consequent expansive views of positive futures in community life
2. Challenge deficiency thinking -old ways of thinking about what the student can't do- and leave behind limiting views about the future
3. Discover places, people, and associations in the student's local community and consequently strengthen the student's involvement in these opportunities.
4. Increase expectations of school programs and adult service agencies to provide individualized support for integrated community experiences.
5. Join with others to advocate for resources and services that fit the student's vision.

Staff Support

Two skilled staff (employed by Job Path at 1.5 FTE) support Pathfinders students and families by meeting them in their homes; helping them to arrange the assistance they need to participate in the project (interpreters, transportation plans, food preferences, etc.); supporting them to gather and maintain a working team; assisting them to do their part in following through on plans, filling out paper work that comes in unfamiliar languages, negotiating eligibility for adult services funding, and locating and selecting an adult service provider; and tracking follow through by school and

adult service staff. They are also available on request for school and adult service system staff to consult, to problem-solve, and to provide links to help. Their direct engagement with families on their own turf is one key to a much higher level of family and extended family participation in the Pathfinders's process than school personnel predicted.

Pathfinders's staff do not duplicate the efforts of system personnel. They do the many kinds of relationship work that often goes undone by overloaded teachers, service coordinators, and case managers. It is up to them to discover ways to shift the system's inertia, opening up small cracks in walls of routine that allow people to wiggle through and experience new possibilities. They help teams find ways to offer each member real opportunities to contribute to the student's success. They also bear the frustration that often goes with high expectations for people they care about in a system that often does not know how to keep its agreements with the people and families it serves.

Discover ways to shift the system's inertia, opening up small cracks in walls of routine that allow people to wiggle through and experience new possibilities.

Person-centered Planning

Five times in each school year, from 12 to 20 Pathfinders's students and their teams gather from across the city for a daylong workshop. Project participation and team membership are voluntary. Teams include District 75 students, family members (usually one or two parents, sometimes grandparents, brothers or sisters, and occasionally aunts, uncles, and cousins), school staff, and, as graduation approaches, adult service staff sometimes join the team.

The meeting space reflects Pathfinders's staff efforts to create a welcoming and stimulating environment for creative work. The variety of meals and snacks mirror the participants's diverse cultural identities and provision has been made to accommodate different languages and modes of communication. There is a roving microphone to amplify each person's contribution to the large group's work. There is lots of poster paper, many multi-colored pens, and numerous graphic aids to encourage communication about personal capacities and positive visions for the future.

A team of experienced facilitators guides the process. They work to build a large group climate of trust and collaboration by making

it safe and acceptable for every team member to share dreams, fears, achievements, reservations, discoveries and uncertainties. They support people to talk from their hearts and not just from their heads. They encourage clear, ordinary language and discourage the jargon, acronyms, and labeling that can trap people's thinking and create distance between those who label and those who bear labels. They invent ways to invite people to move beyond their roles as "Teacher" or "Mom" or "Assistant Principal" or "Transition Coordinator" or "Special Ed student" and into creative thinking and action for real change. They actively support students to risk speaking out about what really matters to them, in whatever form allows them expression. They structure the work of the students's teams and the work of the whole group to encourage an active search for capacity and opportunity.

The purpose: to encourage, guide, and actively support each person to connect with local opportunities, discover capacities and make a positive contribution.

The purpose of each workshop is the same as the purpose of each team meeting: to encourage, guide, and actively support each student, family member, and staff person to connect with local opportunities, discover capacities and make a positive contribution. From the first workshop, team members hear the stories of students, parents, and staff who have gone before them from the students and parents themselves.

Initial workshops support teams to construct personal profiles and a living account of what the student and those who know and care about the student see as a desirable future. (See Mount, 2000b for the details of this process and the graphic formats that support it). Later workshops bring people information about the ways the system works, about the everyday work of community building, and, perhaps most important, news from other teams about their discoveries, achievements, difficulties, and questions.

The level of mutual support that develops among students and parents outweighs the problems of many teams working in the same time and space. Teams have the opportunity to follow up on partially completed tasks as they meet between workshops.

The Pathfinders's Experience

Many Pathfinders want to reach out to other students and parents to encourage and inform their search for a capacity view. These two excerpts from a workbook for Pathfinders Participants (Mount and Lyle O'Brien, 2000) capture the experience from the point of view of a student and from the point of view of a student's father.

Hi. I'm Josh.

I graduated from high school a year ago…

I love geography. I love to look up places in the Atlas. I am a big fan of the weather channel, and I like to find the places discussed on the weather channel.

The mailroom job is perfect for me because I learn more about geography. I move around all day, and I sort and put things in order, which I love.

I am going on job interviews now as I would like to become permanently employed in a mailroom. I would like to work in a mailroom. My job coach goes with me.*

One person in my Synagogue is writing a recommendation to help me get a job. He remembers my enthusiasm during my Bar Mitzvah.

Yes, you heard me. To the surprise of many people, I completed the requirements for and participated in my Bar Mitzvah at my synagogue. I memorized many of the songs, prayers, and Hebrew and I sailed through the service! I was so excited because I did so well. It was the first time I ever spoke in front of a lot of people, and everyone was so happy. People said such wonderful things to me. People never cheer during services, but everyone was cheering that day! It was one of the best days of my life!!!!!

I also have earned the 6th belt required of a Tae Kwan Do master. I am a member of a Tae Kwan Do School in my neighborhood. The whole place works together to help me earn my belts. I was amazed that I broke the board to earn my last belt. I was shocked. I couldn't believe it! Everyone cheered. It is a great feeling to belong to this group and be invited to all the great parties too.
(Wolf, J., 2000)

Twenty-one years ago, my wife Lucia and I had a beautiful girl

*Josh now works in the mailroom at Goldman Sachs, the investment banking firm

whom we named Cristina. When Cristina was only eighteen months old, our baby girl came down with meningitis. That bout with meningitis changed her life and our lives forever. After three days in the hospital, we brought her home but we had no idea what was ahead.

Needless to say, since early on, Cristina was overly protected not only by us, but also by everyone else in our extended families including her grandparents, uncles, cousins, and friends. Cristina was after all a very special child... For example, we never allowed Cristina to go outside and play with other kids her own age. We felt that she would be treated differently, maybe even with cruelty by the other children. In their innocence, they would not understand how she was different and special.

We always held Cristina by her hand whenever we took her out of the house. She soon grew accustomed to being treated this way. As she walked she kept her eyes very close to the ground, no more than two or three feet in front of her. She depended on us to be her own eyes and ears.

When I attended my first Pathfinders workshop about two years ago, I was outraged and couldn't believe the things I heard at that meeting. They talked about empowering young adults like Cristina to take charge of their lives. How could they? In my mind, this was all nonsense. Very discouraged, I came home and I told my wife that I was not going back to the second workshop.

Even though I was angry, I couldn't forget the things I heard. Could Cristina have an independent and productive life? Other parents and their children talked about their dreams and ambitions for their future, and these dreams were not that different from my own when I was their age. I went to the second workshop and I was intrigued but not yet convinced that Cristina could actually have all these things.

I wanted my wife to hear what I was hearing, so I brought her to the next workshop. I was almost to the point of letting Cristina dream about all these wonderful things for herself. My wife went through the same trauma and disbelief as I did.

In spite of our disbelief, we soon became believers... After hear-

ing only words of encouragement and love from these unique professionals, we were more receptive to many ideas, including supporting Cristina to learn to travel using the bus and subway. She now travels from one side of the Bronx to the other on her own!!!!

Cristina just graduated this year, the year 2000, so we are moving into another chapter in her adult life. A year ago we feared reaching this milestone, but today we are far more hopeful. A year ago, we could have never imagined that Cristina would work at the Gap in Manhattan and travel there independently from our house in the Bronx!! Each step we took to build belonging and contribution to community life, both through volunteer and paid work, took Cristina one step closer to her dream of working at the Gap.*

This journey toward community inclusion started the day we let ourselves brainstorm about community building. You won't believe what you will come up with if you ask yourself the same questions, and are open to new ideas!

We have learned that Cristina is in the center of her future, and we have become the source of encouragement for her to continue to become more independent. Cristina dreams about living in her own apartment in New York City. She talks about her mother, sister, and I coming to visit only!!! Given all that has happened in the past year, anything seems possible when we have faith, determination, and take one step at a time! (Rodriguez, 2000)

"The journey toward community inclusion started the day we let ourselves brainstorm about community building."

Of course, there are some stories with fewer exclamation points. Segregation is sticky, and some families have traded uncertainty about whether adult service providers could learn to deliver individualized supports in a timely and reliable way for the certainty of a day activity program slot. Some students have not had a team member with the energy and ability to pull things back together and have lost their place in valued neighborhood activities. Some graduates remain in the training placements popular with the City's supported employment providers instead of moving on to the payroll as a full employee of the business they work for. These problems cannot be explained by individual disability or family troubles. They are clearly problems the service systems have to

*Christina continues to commute to Manhattan, where she now works at Daffy's, a clothing store.

solve. And one consequence of Pathfinders is that the people with developmental disabilities and their families know that the problem is not their fault and they know that positive change is possible.

Pathfinders's participants –students, family members, school staff, and adult service staff- witness that searching for capacity works as a way to make it in New York. And, as one of the city's anthems has it, "If you can make it here, you can make it anywhere."

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